

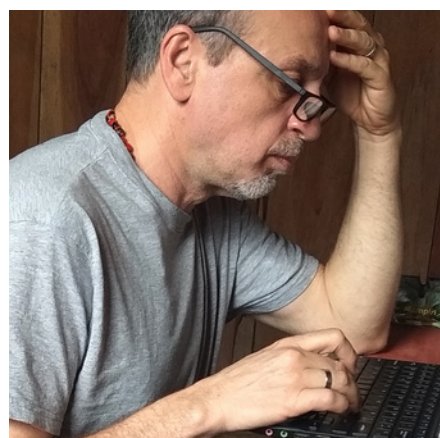


VIRTUAL ENCOUNTERS: TRANSFORMATIONS OF SHAMANISM

A DIALOGUE WITH SANTIAGO
LÓPEZ-PAVILLARD

After the first “encounter with native knowledge”, in which FIND Intellectual Dialogue discussed the social context, myths and rituals of Amazonian shamanism with a Shipibo shaman, this virtual encounter intends to analyze the transformations of shamanism from its native context to the various forms it adopted historically and geographically and gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of shamanism in general. For this purpose, FIND Intellectual Dialogue will meet Santiago López-Pavillard, anthropologist and chairman of the Asociación Eleusis. López-Pavillard’s research and field work, both in South America and Europe, encompasses not only shamanic practices in indigenous contexts but also entheogene-based religious movements (like the church of Santo Daime) and neo-shamanic rituals in the European context.

López-Pavillard’s profile is not that of a typical scholar. In fact, he is convinced that the shift in ant



thropological work from “armchair anthropology” (Tylor, Frazer, Durkheim) to “participant observation” (from Malinoswki to

Descola) is not enough to understand the specificity of shamanism. This specificity does not lie in the social function of the shaman and the collective mode of behavior responding to that function and nurturing - in socio-cultural terms - a certain world configuration, but in a profound understanding of shamanic trance. From this point of view, the relationship between individual and context, modes of behavior and world-configuration or humans and non-humans can be grasped if the ethnologist first modifies his/her own world-conception, something which means breaking with automatisms of all kinds (including those making out epistemic standards of the dominant scholarly research) until one can glimpse the other world-configuration from the inside. With his method of radical participation, López-Pavillard opens the debate as to whether this methodological turn abandons the field of scholarly research altogether or changes it to the point of inaugurating a paradigm shift. With regard to the practice of shamanism, he also tries to find a holistic criterion encompassing the different modalities (in terms of their local and temporal axis) and mapping the “world of spirits” with a transculturally-oriented vocabulary - assuming all the risks related to this procedure. The intellectual courage emanating from his research on shamanism deserves attention and his arguments call for a thorough discussion to better understand the transformations of shamanism beyond epistemic reductions and cultural prejudices.